

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

Solving Colombia's Problems

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The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

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ABSTRACT

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Sometimes viewed as a quagmire of countless problems, Colombia may well be a country with no realistic approach to resolve its internal conflicts. Nevertheless, the United States remains Colombia's strongest supporter and advocate for changes in their country. But how strong is the nations commitment to Colombia? After Egypt and Israel, Colombia ranks third in receiving financial assistance from the United States. However, despite the substantial investment from the United States, results to date have been marginal at best. Therefore, this paper addresses these issues and offers recommendations based on a holistic approach to resolving Colombia's problems.

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SOLVING COLOMBIA'S PROBLEMS

There is a deadly nexus between terrorism and drug trafficking that poses a serious threat to American security. We have learned and we have demonstrated, that drug traffickers and terrorists work out of the same jungle; they plan in the same cave and they train in the same desert.

— Asa Hutchinson
Head of Drug Enforcement Administration

Immediately following operations in Iraq, the United States (U.S.) should redirect its military forces to Colombia in order to assist the Colombian government in combat operations against its three main insurgent terrorist groups. Additionally, it is anticipated that a strong U.S. military presence should remain in Colombia to “enforce the peace” until the terrorist groups no longer pose a threat to Colombian’s democracy. While this suggestion may sound feasible, most Americans would not consider this course of action as viable or desirable. Nonetheless, this SRP addresses the perplexing question: “How should the U. S. finally help to resolve the problems in Colombia?”

WHY SHOULD THE UNITED STATES CARE ABOUT COLOMBIA?

Why should the U.S. care about what’s happening in Colombia? More to the point, why should it expend valuable resources to help solve Colombia’s problems? The primary reason is because with its 43 million citizens, Colombia is the second largest country in South America and fifth largest U.S. trading partner in the region. The two countries conducted \$11.1 billion in trade last year, including Colombia’s sale of \$3.6 billion of oil to the U.S. last year.¹ Furthermore, during the past decade bilateral agreements have cooperatively addressed environmental protection, civil aviation, asset sharing, chemical control, and extradition.² In addition, the two countries have an important maritime ship-boarding agreement allowing for the search of suspected drug-running vessels. However, Colombia has been plagued with destabilizing problems, including insurgency, drug trafficking, and a government so corrupt it is incapable of solving the country’s problems. These issues threaten our trade with Colombia and consequently our interests in the region. Therefore, the U.S. must develop a more effective strategy to bring closure to Colombia’s problems.



FIGURE 1 COLOMBIA

U.S. INTERESTS IN COLOMBIA

What are the U.S. interests in Colombia? The National Security Strategy, which defines the U.S. strategic objectives in Colombia, states:

In Colombia, we recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups. We are working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provide basic security to the Colombian people.³

Furthermore, the Commission on America's National Interests has prioritized U.S. national interests, several of which are applicable to Colombia. These interests are divided into the following categories: vital national interests, extremely important national interests, important national interests, and less important or secondary national interests.⁴

VITAL NATIONAL INTERESTS

“Vital national interests are conditions that are strictly necessary to safeguard and enhance America’s survival and well-being in a free and secure nation.”⁵ Due to Colombia’s long-standing civil war, two of the vital interests identified by the Commission apply to Colombia:

- Ensure U.S. allies’ survival and their active cooperation with the U.S. in shaping an international system in which we can thrive.
- Prevent the emergence of a hostile major power or failed state on U.S. borders.⁶

EXTREMELY IMPORTANT NATIONAL INTERESTS

“Extremely important national interests are conditions that if compromised, would severely prejudice but not strictly imperil the ability of the U.S. government to safeguard and enhance the well-being of Americans in a free and secure nation.”⁷ The two extremely important national interests which apply to Colombia are:

- Promote democracy, prosperity, and stability in the Western Hemisphere
- Prevent, manage, and if possible at a reasonable cost, end conflicts in important geographic regions.⁸

Again, Colombia’s civil war impacts our interests in the region. Additionally, because Colombia’s adversaries finance its war efforts through the production and distribution of illegal narcotics, they are destabilizing the region.⁹

IMPORTANT NATIONAL INTERESTS

“Important national interests are conditions that, if compromised, would have major negative consequences for the ability of the U.S. Government to safeguard and enhance the well-being of Americans in a free and secure nation.”¹⁰ Massive human rights violations in Colombia jeopardize U.S. relations with that country and thereby threaten an important U.S. national interest.¹¹ It is estimated that 1.8 million people are missing and presumed dead as a result of drug violence in the 1990s.¹² Although the Colombian government is striving to make human rights improvements, the current struggle in their country claims 3,500 lives a year in the rural areas.¹³ In addition, Colombian terrorist groups have been responsible for an estimated 3,250 kidnappings for ransom per year since 1998.¹⁴

COLOMBIA'S PROBLEMS

What are the problems in Colombia? Colombia's current turmoil began with a rural civil war fought between Colombia's Liberal and Conservative parties for political control during the period from 1948 to 1953.¹⁵ "During this period, referred to as 'La Violencia,' groups of armed men paid by political bosses from both sides of the conflict, often with assistance from the police, would attack villages, scalping and decapitating peasants."¹⁶ Unfortunately, some fifty years later these massive human rights abuses continue.¹⁷ "The conflict is driven by a complex system of economic and land related needs, and age old divides between rich and poor and accompanying social inequities."¹⁸ This historical conflict notwithstanding, we should fully examine the range of issues confronting Colombia because they directly impact or influence U.S. interests. Although complex and numerous, Colombia's problems can be categorized in three major areas: terrorism, drugs, and governmental corruption.

TERRORISM

Terrorism is effectively defined as "the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological."¹⁹ Although Colombia has been dealing with terrorist problems for several years, U.S. assistance has been primarily aimed at curbing the drug trade.²⁰ Even so, the U.S. State Department recognizes that there are terrorists in Colombia and lists three such organizations operating in their nation:²¹ the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), and the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC).²²

According to the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Colombian terrorist groups do not have global reach like al-Qaeda or Hizballah, who operate in the Middle East.²³ Nevertheless, the effects of their illegal drug activities are indeed global. Moreover, FARC and AUC are involved in every facet of narcotics trafficking- including cultivation, processing and transportation of cocaine and heroin.²⁴ Likewise, the brutality with which they protect their drug investment is consistent with the methods used by other worldwide terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. They have a lot to protect: the income these terrorist organizations derive from narcotics is estimated at over \$300 million a year.²⁵ In addition, the revenues from these activities have fueled their expansion, both in numbers and armaments, over the last ten years.²⁶ By most estimates, proceeds from drugs contribute more to Colombia's economy than coffee, and most of the drug traffic is in the hands of the three terrorist organizations.²⁷

The communist-led FARC is the largest terrorist organization in the country with an estimated force of 18,000 fighters. The ELN was formed in 1965 by a radical Spanish priest, it includes approximately 5,000 fighters.²⁸ The AUC is an 11,000-member right-wing organization, originally formed by landowners to protect themselves against robbery and kidnapping.²⁹ Together the FARC and ELN organizations routinely engage in massacres, kidnappings and attacks on key infrastructures (such as, oil pipelines and power grids). For example, ELN and FARC bombings of key infrastructure cost the Colombian Government over \$500 million in lost oil revenue in 2000.³⁰ Additionally, they collectively kill 3,000 Colombians.³¹ Among the kidnap victims were 289 children, the youngest of whom was only three years old.³²

To ensure the success of their illegal business activity, these terrorist groups are creating a lawless anarchic society in order to prey on and profit from innocent civilians and legitimate business activities. It is not safe to drive down the roads outside any city in Colombia. A person can be kidnapped anywhere, at any time.³³ The danger is even greater to Colombian citizens who live in the same city where political leaders reside or conduct political functions. This was evident last AUG when FARC fired mortar shells in an attempt to assassinate President Uribe at his own inauguration.³⁴ Although the shells missed their intended victim, 21 people were killed in a poor neighborhood of Bogotá.³⁵ In another case, FARC fired mortar shells which landed on a church in Bojayá, killing 119 villagers.³⁶

The statistics on violence perpetrated by terrorist groups in Colombia are staggering. For example, 41,564 murders were committed in 1999. In addition, between 1989-99, 138 mayors were murdered, as well as 569 members of parliament and city council.³⁷ Even the judicial system isn't immune to the wrath from terrorists. For instance, in one year 53 members of the federal judiciary were killed.³⁸ In 1985, 11 Supreme Court Justices were killed in a single terrorist attack.³⁹ In total, it is estimated that 1.8 million people are missing as a result of drug violence.⁴⁰

The terrorist organizations in Colombia do not limit their attacks to the citizens in their own country. On February 22, 2003, representatives FARC announced that they were holding three Americans hostages, claiming to have shot down their plane over southern Colombia.⁴¹ The terrorists are demanding that the Colombian military halt operations in their area in return for the Americans' safety.⁴² The Americans were on a U.S. government plane conducting an intelligence mission when it crashed on February 13, 2003.⁴³ A fourth American and a Colombian army sergeant were shot and killed at the site of the crash.⁴⁴ The kidnapping marks

the first time U.S. government employees have been captured in Colombia's long-standing civil war.⁴⁵

DRUG TRAFFICKING

Those organizations involved in the illicit drug trafficking in Colombia have been labeled by the international community as narco-terrorists. More explicitly narco-terrorist organizations are organized groups that are complicit in the activities of drug trafficking in order to further, or fund, premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets with the intention to influence a government or group of people.⁴⁶ It is important to differentiate between drug-related violence and narco-terrorism. By definition, terrorism is premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets. However, drug-related violence is "financially motivated violence perpetrated against those who interfere with or cross the path of a drug trafficking organization."⁴⁷ Consequently, narco-terrorist crimes may include "assassinations, extortion, hijackings, bombings, and kidnappings directed against judges, prosecutors, elected officials, or law enforcement agents, and general disruption of a legitimate government to divert attention from drug operations."⁴⁸ Moreover, while drug-related violence permeates society at all levels and is visible at every stage of the drug trade, the acts from narco-terrorism, are clearly evident, but the funding source is often well-disguised. For instance, recently it came to light that terrorists organizations in Colombia were using international life insurance policies to launder millions of dollars in illicit proceeds from the United States.⁴⁹ The drug traffickers "used illicit cash to buy life insurance policies in the U.S and the Isle of Man, which is off the west coast of Britain, to put extra cash in them and then liquidated the proceeds, according to court documents."⁵⁰ "Although buyers had to pay penalties to cash the accounts early, the resulting check or wire transfers appeared to be legitimate investment proceeds."⁵¹ Through the results of a two-year investigations, U.S. authorities were able to seize \$9.5 million from about 250 accounts connected to the scheme.⁵² However, officials estimate that the accounts may have been used to launder as much as \$80 million over the past decade.⁵³

America is the unfortunate beneficiary of the bounty yielded from Colombia's narco-terrorist activities. While estimates vary, most experts agree between 80-90 percent of Colombia's cocaine and more than 50 percent of its heroin are sold in the U.S.⁵⁴ This translates to Americans consuming approximately 260 metric tons of cocaine and 13 metric tons of heroin per year.⁵⁵ This means Americans are spending \$45 billion on drugs, which is more than three times the amount that will be spent by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in

2003.⁵⁶ Moreover, drug use in America costs an additional \$100 billion a year on health care, law enforcement, and other activities to counter the adverse affects of drugs.⁵⁷ Tragically, the use and sale of illegal drugs in the U.S. results in the loss of approximately 52,000 citizens each year.⁵⁸

Illicit drug use in America also is affecting the nation's youth, as revealed by the findings from the Federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The Center estimates that "by the time students complete high school, 47 percent have smoked marijuana and 24 percent have used another illicit drug."⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Center found that sixty percent of all high school students indicate that there are drugs on their campus and just as alarming is that thirty percent of middle school students say the same.⁶⁰ This scourge will add \$41 billion to the costs of elementary and secondary education in terms of special education, teacher turnover, truancy, property damage, theft, injury, counseling and other costs directly related to substance abuse and addiction.⁶¹

America is not the only country suffering at the hands illicit drug activity. Colombia's \$4 billion dollar narcotics industry has played a major role in financing the country's nearly 40-year civil war.⁶² In addition, the violence in Colombia has led to over one million internally displaced residents, while countless numbers of its citizens are seeking shelter in Panama, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.⁶³

The events of September 11th brought into new focus the problems from narco-terrorism.⁶⁴ The events on that day forever changed the world and demonstrated the vulnerability to acts of terrorism of even the most powerful nation.⁶⁵ In attempting to combat the terrorist threat from September 11, the link between drugs and terrorism came to the forefront because the proceeds from illegal drug activities helped fund the terrorist events that were perpetuated on September 11.⁶⁶ This is to say, the revenue from opium rich Afghanistan helped finance both the Taliban government and the al-Qaeda terrorist network.⁶⁷ "The Al Qaeda experience in Afghanistan showed the world that the nexus between organized crime, drugs, and terrorism can completely undermine a nation and spread tentacles of terror and evil worldwide"⁶⁸ This threats to the nation from this phenomenon do not conclude with al Qaeda. Recently, U.S. officials thwarted two separate plans to use drug money to buy weapons for terrorists, including an alleged attempt by a U.S. citizen and two Pakistanis to swap tons of heroin and hashish for Stinger missiles that they planned to sell to al Qaeda.⁶⁹ "In the second case, Justice Department officials said they had broken up a plot by right-wing Colombian paramilitaries to buy \$25 million worth of high-powered East European weaponry with cocaine

and cash.”⁷⁰ This latter case serves to further demonstrate that Colombia’s drug activity does indeed have global consequences.

GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION

Terrorists’ constant and unyielding use of violence against elected officials has greatly impacted the Colombian government. In many instances, leaders are expected to take bribes from the terrorists or face death.⁷¹ Since Colombia elected President Uribe in May 2002, more than 200 mayors and municipal officials have resigned as a result of FARC death threats, and approximately one in five of the Colombia’s 1,200 municipalities lack a governmental presence.⁷² Terrorist organizations have made it virtually impossible for honest leaders in Colombia to serve their citizens. They have effectively subverted the democratic process.

Notwithstanding, corruption is also the “modus operandi” within the Colombian government.⁷³ Curtis Kamman, the former American Ambassador to Colombia, says “Up to two-thirds of those elected to the Colombian Congress are willingly taking bribes from at least one of the three terrorist organizations.”⁷⁴ In exchange, the Colombian legislature in the past rewarded the terrorist organizations by passing numerous laws designed to protect the illegally armed groups.⁷⁵ Another form of corruption comes from elected officials’ unwillingness to break ties with the para-military AUC organization. This corrupt relationship largely accounts for the Uribe Administration’s inability to promote the much needed reform of the Colombian government.⁷⁶

WHAT HAS BEEN THE U.S. STRATEGY TO ASSIST COLOMBIA?

What has been the U.S. strategy to assist Colombia? Two reoccurring have dominated the U.S. approach to Colombia: (1) the problems in Colombia are complex and (2) Colombia cannot solve its problems without considerable outside intervention. The overarching goals of U.S. strategy and policy are identified in Plan Colombia: Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and Strengthening of the State.

PLAN COLOMBIA

The United States has historically underestimated the connection between drug trafficking and terrorist movements.⁷⁷ Accordingly, at least through the Clinton Administration, Colombia’s problems were viewed mostly in terms of drug-trafficking. This focus on drugs is reflected in the policy outlined in Plan Colombia.⁷⁸

The administration of Andrés Pastrana, then Colombia’s President, developed Plan Colombia in 1998. He proposed Plan Colombia as means to restore confidence in both the

armed forces and the government, to curb corruption, and to combat the destabilizing power of drug trafficking that with its huge economic resources had generated indiscriminate violence.⁷⁹ Although the Colombia government wrote Plan Colombia, it was subsequently modified and adopted by the U.S. through Congressional legislation. Plan Colombia is very straightforward. It directly links economic development, security, and peace. While some aspects of Plan Colombia address military requirements, contrary to many non-governmental organizations and media reports, the over-arching plan is not a military strategy. Instead, the military component is only one of 10 elements in a plan that is designed to restore Colombia to a secure democracy- free from terrorist violence and government corruption.⁸⁰

When Plan Colombia was enacted, the Pastrana administration thought it would be executed primarily by Colombia, with assistance from the U.S., Europe, Japan, and Canada.⁸¹ Plan Colombia expressly calls for the U.S. to assist in reducing Colombia's drug trafficking and its corresponding problems.⁸² The U.S. has justified its assistance on the concept that if the funding from illicit drug activity could be stopped or significantly reduced, then the terrorists could not launch their ruthless campaigns against the citizens of Colombia, then Colombia would be able to prosper.⁸³ Furthermore, elimination of the drug cartels would alleviate the perceived need for the paramilitaries such as the AUC to exist, since a legitimate and effective government could be installed.⁸⁴ Moreover, with their main source of revenue and power eliminated, FARC and ELN would be compelled to work seriously with the nation's elected leaders to negotiate an end to the civil conflict. Eventually, legitimate authority would be restored.⁸⁵

When Colombia's former President Pastrana presented Plan Colombia to the U.S., the Clinton Administration and Congressional lawmakers were attracted to it for several reasons.⁸⁶ First, it was viewed as a comprehensive approach to counter the international drug trafficking epidemic that the Reagan administration had labeled as one of the most insidious threats to U.S. national security.⁸⁷ Secondly, it was embraced by some members of Congress out of a sincere sense of altruism, idealism, and a desire to help a long-suffering neighbor in the hemisphere.⁸⁸ Lastly, more pragmatic lawmakers viewed Plan Colombia as a bold (albeit costly) strategy to (1) stabilize the geopolitics of our hemisphere, (2) protect the U.S. and international foreign investments and interests in Colombia, and (3) stimulate the economic vitality of an international military/ industrial complex.⁸⁹ However, Plan Colombia was also met with skepticism by some of the U.S. political leaders. "Critics of the US funding for Plan Colombia expressed two concerns: the documented complicity of Colombian army units and

paramilitary death squads in human rights violations, and possibility that funds authorized to combat drug trafficking really would be used to combat insurgents.⁹⁰ Other critics such as Congressman David Obey (D-WI) stated in his appearance before the House Appropriations Committee on March 9, 2000 that:

In my view, all of the American money, all of the American helicopters, all of the American military advice in the world cannot achieve the successful outcome on this problem if you do not have the sustained will and determination on the part of the Colombian people and their elite, their economic and social elite, to deal with the core in that society that must be dealt with if we are going to get a leg up on this problem. I think the key lesson we learned in Vietnam is that this country can never do for another country what that country can do for itself if that country does not have the will to do everything to deal with its problems.⁹¹

Notwithstanding, when all was said and done, in the summer of 2000 President Clinton effortlessly persuaded the Congress to enact Public Law 106-246, which authorized \$1.3 billion in aid to Colombia.⁹² However, only \$296 million of the \$1.3 billion package was set aside for economic development and building state capacity.⁹³ The remainder went to provide military assistance to interdict drugs. This included America's commitment to provide military equipment (18 Blackhawks and 32 Huey helicopters) and up to a maximum of 400 U.S. military personnel and 400 private contractors to assist the Colombian government's efforts to combat drug trafficking.⁹⁴ Furthermore, to address the concerns of critics that the money would be used to combat insurgents, Public Law 106-246 incorporated five separate human rights provisions and stipulated that U.S. aid was to be used exclusively for the war on drugs.⁹⁵

So far the nation's investment in Plan Colombia, has energized Colombia's economy, which should help to reduce the country's 18-20 percent unemployment.⁹⁶ Moreover, to varying degrees, there has also been a reduction in narcotics production and trafficking.⁹⁷ For example, as a result of mutual legal assistance under Plan Colombia and from prior commitments, 23 drug kingpins were removed from their country during 2001.⁹⁸ Officials also claim that 84,000 hectares of the coca and poppy crops have also been destroyed.⁹⁹

The U.S. has maintained its commitments to Plan Colombia. However, the Plan has not been fully funded due to non-payment from the Europeans.¹⁰⁰ The Plan's projected cost was estimated at \$7.5 billion- with \$4 billion of the required funding to be provided by the Colombia government and the remainder of the necessary \$3.5 billion to be contributed by the international community.¹⁰¹ The U.S. portion was estimated at \$1.3 billion although in reality America has already contributed \$1.7 billion in aid.¹⁰² On the other hand, the international

support to Colombia has only amounted to between \$550-600 million in total aid from the combined contributions of the European Union, the United Nations, Japan, and Canada.¹⁰³ This is because a number of events have disrupted Plan Colombia's implementation. The European nations and Japan, which initially supported the plan and pledged more than \$300 million to the endeavor, pulled the plug on their support, blaming the United States for unilaterally negotiating the military and anti-narcotics components in the plan.¹⁰⁴ These nations argued that the U.S. policy of providing military support would only heighten the tensions in Colombia, rather than stabilize the country. Even so, the position of the Europeans and Japan was interesting at best and baffling to say the least. This is because as the Europeans and Japan were criticizing the U.S. for providing military assistance to Colombia, they were simultaneously hosting and toasting FARC terrorists who were visiting Europe and even treated them as esteemed celebrities.¹⁰⁵

IS PLAN COLOMBIA WORKING?

Is Plan Colombia working? More than two years into Plan Colombia, President Uribe has requested increased funding from the U.S. However, Senator Patrick Leahy summed up Congressional sentiment on this point during President-elect Uribe's recent visit to Capitol Hill. Leahy declared "The results of Plan Colombia have been disappointing. In fact, after spending more than \$1.5 billion, in many respects the situation is worse today than before Plan Colombia began."¹⁰⁶ Senator Leahy's statements should not come as a great surprise to those familiar with the Colombia government history of mishandling foreign aid in the war against drugs and in their parallel inability to resolve their country's narcoterrorism problem.¹⁰⁷

When discussing Colombia, it is quite easy to become very pessimistic. This paper is no exception. Colombia's problems are complex and do not lend themselves to any easy or rapid solution. It is important to take a very critical examination in order to find solutions that will work. Nevertheless, many feel that Colombia is far from being a "failed state." A positive note is the performance of the Colombian President Uribe. With only several months at the helm it is too early to tell but there is cause for hope. The Colombian people, through their elected leaders, are working to reform the nation's political and legal systems, promote socio-economic development, protect human rights, provide help to displaced persons, enlarge and professionalize the security forces and combat narcoterrorism.¹⁰⁸

After assuming office on August 7, 2002, President Uribe quickly appointed a cabinet prominent for its expertise and emphasis on results, and immediately took a number of steps to set a positive tone. Soon after his inauguration, in accordance with Colombian law, President

Uribe decreed a “State of Internal Disturbance” under which the government imposed a one-time tax on the wealthiest segment of Colombians. This tax is expected to yield the equivalent of 1.2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), between \$800 million and \$1 billion, to be dedicated exclusively to security. President Uribe’s 2003 budget also calls for increased government defense expenditures which would increase military and police spending from 3.5% this year to a goal of 5.8% of GDP in 2003. The United States and Colombia recognize more will need to be done, but these are decisive first steps.¹⁰⁹

Additionally, the Uribe Administration has introduced an extensive, longer term tax and pension reform package, which has been submitted to the Colombian Congress, and is moving to cut bureaucratic overhead by seeking congressional and public approval in a referendum to reduce government operating costs.¹¹⁰

In addition to the performance of President Uribe and his new administration, no one can deny that Plan Colombia, too, has yielded some positive results. However, the overall effectiveness of this counter-narcotics approach is questionable. By any objective measure, Plan Colombia’s results have been in fact disappointing.¹¹¹ Indeed, there is currently a widespread consensus that drug eradication in Colombia, which has long been the centerpiece of American narcotics policy has failed.¹¹² Since Congress first appropriated money for Plan Colombia, coca cultivation in their country has actually increased, primarily because U.S.-“funded economic programs have produced little in the way of viable alternatives for farmers. It is dangerous and difficult to implement successful programs in the conflict zones where coca is grown, particularly without stronger support from the Colombian government, which has not invested enough of its own money in these areas and has done little to reform its sagging economy.”¹¹³ Another critic of the plan says: “despite the millions donated by the United States for drug crop eradication, the estimated amount of coca and poppy has only increased.”¹¹⁴ The problem is exacerbated further because, although thousands of families entered into contracts not to cultivate coca in exchange for government retraining, this strategy was thwarted by the U.S. redirection to use the funds to build infrastructure instead.¹¹⁵ There is also evidence that coca cultivation is returning to Bolivia and Peru. This is disturbing more because Bolivia and Peru initially eradicated their crops and consequently were the foundations for the programs implemented in Colombia now find that coca production is back on the rise.¹¹⁶ Additionally, attempts to provide farmers with alternatives to growing coca have also failed in Colombia’s southern Putumayo.¹¹⁷ “In addition former Colombian President Andres Pastrana has been widely criticized for not efficiently addressing Colombia’s drug problem, despite the millions in

military assistance being pumped into the country by the United States.¹¹⁸ Rather than “reducing the drug problem and minimizing the civilian death toll, the war has only escalated, averaging 3,600 civilian deaths a year due to the civil conflict.”¹¹⁹

Plan Colombia was really flawed at its inception because it failed to recognize the linkage between drugs and international terrorism. However, as previously noted, the events of 11 September require the U.S. to reexamine its policy to Colombia in light of the increasing connection between drugs and terrorist activity around the globe.¹²⁰ Now is the time for a serious policy debate about U.S. assistance to Colombia, because the fact is, in Colombia, things have just become worse.¹²¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

The foregoing analysis indicates Plan Colombia can no longer be viewed as the best approach to resolving Colombia’s problems. Plan Colombia fundamentally lacks a strategy to address the nexus between drugs and international terrorism. Consequently, the U.S. must adopt a holistic approach the problems afflicting Colombia. Moreover, for this method to succeed, the U.S. must develop a comprehensive strategy which acknowledges that the “war on drugs” and the “war on terrorism” are parts of a global conflict, so they must be addressed as a single problem. Accordingly, the following seven recommendations should be implemented to fully utilize all elements of national power (military, economic, and political and informational).

MILITARY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for U.S. military assistance in Colombia to be successful, the “war on drugs” and the “war on terrorism” must be treated as a single problem. Otherwise, the use of U.S. military force in Colombia will remain relatively ineffective, primarily because the U.S. forces are charged only with assisting Colombia in countering illegal drug activities.¹²² Accordingly, if U.S. military personnel observe terrorist activity in Colombia, they are legally prohibited from taking actions unless the persons observed are directly engaged in illicit drug actions.¹²³ Therefore, there ought to be U.S. military and law enforcement personnel [i.e. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)] should be granted legislated authority to support the Colombian government in combating any and all elements of terrorism. Due to the political sensitivity of this approach, this policy cannot be embedded in military-to-military contacts or other counterinsurgency measures. This more comprehensive approach will certainly arouse criticism that escalating the anti-drug campaign to a broader fight against insurgents could sink the U.S. into a costly quagmire, with echoes of Vietnam.¹²⁴ This will be especially true if “there is no definition of ‘victory’, no clear

articulation of objectives, and no exit strategy.¹²⁵ Therefore, in addition to establishing realistic exit criteria, without question the Colombian government must lead, sanction, and control this effort, with the U.S. strictly in a supporting role. Moreover, for this policy to be effective, the U.S. civilian leadership (i.e., President, Congress, Secretary of Defense, Director CIA, etc) must play a visible role in working with the Colombia government and U.S. personnel in the region. In addition, support for this approach clearly gives international legitimacy to the need to treat the war on drugs and war on terrorism as the same battle.

According to an article published on 10 February 2003 by the U.S. News and World Report (10 Feb 03), the Bush Administration is already considering this concept. The article noted that in November 2002, President Bush signed National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)-18, which expands the role of the military to help the Colombia government combat terrorist activity in their country.¹²⁶ It appears that under NSPD-18 the U.S. military and intelligence agencies can assist Colombia in tracking down and destroying terrorist groups.¹²⁷ But just how much flexibility does NSPD-18 give the U.S. military to support Colombia? In February 2003, U.S. "officials began shifting military resources previously used in anti-drug operations in southern Colombia to Saravena, which lies on the Venezuelan border and is 220 miles east of Bogota, the capital."¹²⁸ The plan sanctions using helicopters directly against the two terrorist organizations.¹²⁹ In addition, "under the program, the Colombian military is scheduled to buy additional helicopters and other military equipment."¹³⁰ Further, "the effort has been presented as a way to help Colombian troops protect an economically important government oil pipeline from guerrilla attack."¹³¹ However, it is clear from current U.S. military training that defending the pipeline will mostly entail offensive operations against the seasoned terrorists who have been prospering through their illegal and brutal activities.¹³²

ECONOMIC

Recently, Congressional supporters of the U.S. strategy in Colombia have criticized its overwhelming military focus.¹³³ These members advocate an increase in economic and social assistance while maintaining the military support. In addition, religious, human rights, development, and refugee organizations have focused on the increased tensions between the Andean governments and the rise in political violence, refugees, and the "spill-over" of illicit drug production and conflict into other parts of Colombia and neighboring countries.¹³⁴ Moreover, "expanding and deepening US involvement in Colombia's conflict without evidence of improvements in the government's human rights policies may result in worsening an already grave human rights situation."¹³⁵ Therefore, a second recommendation is that the U.S. should

withhold or severely limit economic assistance until the Colombian government institutes stringent and verifiable measures to eliminate paramilitary groups and punish their violations of human rights. This would include the government (1) increasing the arrests of FARC, ELN, and AUC members (2) purging members of the armed forces who maintain ties to paramilitary groups or who tolerate their activities, and (3) enforcing the hundreds of outstanding arrest warrants for paramilitary leaders. Once Colombia has demonstrated its resolve to combat paramilitary groups, a third recommendation is that the U.S. Should provide resources to strengthen the Colombian judiciary system and to protect its members from attack, both in its field investigations and in its day-to-day operations. These resources should also be used to defend and protect the sectors of civil society striving to support the peace process, human rights, and the rule of law. To ensure that Colombia meets such commitments, the U.S. should continue to monitor (as part of any economic assistance) the public progress reports on the implementation of the Colombian government's commitment to investigate human rights violations, to install security infrastructure for groups at risk, and to prosecute those implicated in such attacks.¹³⁶

Colombia needs to re-educate its farmers to produce alternative crops instead of coca and poppy. However, the U.S. redirected funds from this effort to be used to build infrastructure in the country. Understanding that infrastructure and alternative crop farming are critically linked, the fourth recommendation is for the U.S. to re-establish funding for both these programs. If the farmers do not learn how to plant alternative crops or learn different skills altogether, there is little hope that drug activities can be eliminated in Colombia.

Lastly, a strong, healthy growing economy with opportunity for all Colombians is the key to building peace and making progress in the war against illegal drugs.¹³⁷ Therefore the fifth recommendation is for the U.S. to develop a program with Colombia to create new employment, expanding international trade and increasing foreign investment in the country.

POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The sixth recommendation is for the U.S. to initiate U.N. resolutions to develop a coherent negotiating strategy, providing extensive mediation assistance to the peace processes, including advice on ceasefire strategies, verification mechanisms, and protection of insurgents during ceasefires. Such international support is vital if a holistic approach to terrorism is to succeed. Moreover, the single war concept will only be effective "if" the international community accepts buy in to the approach and agrees to provide requisite support.

INFORMATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, for this holistic concept to be effective, the seventh recommendation is for the Bush administration to initiate focused speeches to inform the nation and make them aware of U.S. national interests in Colombia. The objectives of these speeches would be threefold. First, they would serve to better educate the nation concerning the threat that narcoterrorism poses to the security of the country and the world in general, and consequently why it is critical to the country to treat the war as a single entity. Secondly, they would serve to raise the nation's awareness of U.S. interests in Colombia and the region. Lastly, the speeches and subsequent discussions and media deliberations would serve to provide a means to solicit alternative and practical approaches to the both Colombia's drug problem and the link between drugs and global terrorism.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The problems in Colombia are extremely complex, and they directly influence and shape U.S. policy. Given that the war on drugs and the war on terrorism are directly and intricately related, the U.S. should treat them as a single conflict. Not only will this help the country better utilize its resources, it will serve to more effectively assist the Colombian government in combating the full range of terrorist activity in their nation. Nevertheless, expanding the scope of U.S. involvement in Colombia is risky. It will be subjected to a great deal of scrutiny and no doubt criticism. However, doing more of the same poses a greater threat to national security.

WORD COUNT =6,129

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